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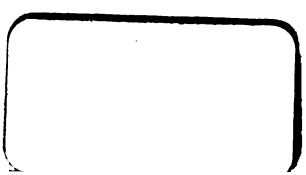

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FEBRUARY

THE waters awake at last, and the tawny
meads grow green;
Clouds run over the sky, and the air is wild
with glee.
Who can doubt for a minute what all the stir
may mean?
The Thrush goes flying up to the top of the
poplar-tree,
With a "Spring! Spring! Spring!
Pretty bird! Pretty bird! Pretty bird!" sings he.

Brave little points of palm begin to twinkle and
gleam;
Frolicsome catkins volley gold-dust over the lea.
Earth is busy forgetting her weariful winter
dream,

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FEBRUARY

And loud and louder sings the Thrush, high up
in the poplar-tree,
With a "Pretty bird! Pretty bird! Pretty bird!
Spring! Spring! Spring!" carols he.

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SPRING'S CHORISTER

SPRING sang a song, and sang it me
  Right glad was I to hear it!
It set my heart from chillness free,
  And gloriously did cheer it.
    Then said sweet Spring
    To me, "Now sing
  An answer, shall come near it."

Therewith I did a song essay,
  Brimming with blithest gladness,
But ah! my voice (alackaday!)
  Still echoed Winter's sadness;
    Well might I try—
    Came never nigh
  That song's bewitching madness.

Then as against a tree I leant,
  And o'er my song was sighing,

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SPRING'S CHORISTER

Came to me for my solacement
Some pretty bird a-flying;
Flew round and round
Above the ground
Where yet the snow was lying:

Flew in and out the branches bare,
Whose arms kind Spring was filling
With baby sunbeams: everywhere
Flew, flitted, flutter'd, trilling
Out of his throat
A little note,
That thro' my heart went thrilling,

Till, looking up, "O Spring!" I said,
"Mute must I stand, confessing
My human dulness. Take, instead
Of mine, this singer's blessing—
In lightsome flight,
And song's delight,
Thy very self expressing!"

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AN INQUEST

BUMBLE'S dead! the young Grass springs,
Deep in blue a Laverock sings,
Violets nestle 'mid the lines
Of the bold bright Celandines,
Willow her golden goblet spills,
And puffs of airy wine distils,
Almond-scented and honey-fed;—
Bumble's not asleep, he's dead!

Dear big beautiful brown Bee,
What hurt you? Let me look and see . .
Thighs, and breast, and head and back—
No! There's not the slightest crack
In these greaves of burnish'd brass,
In this velvety cuirass,

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AN INQUEST

Or all this plated gossamer
Of wings that wont to whirr and whirr.
You burly hoplite, what went wrong
In a panoply so strong?
Your golden collar is in place,
These great eyes visor yet your face,
Your broad sash is not push'd awry.
Bumble! How did you come to die?

Ah! what's this lolling from your lips,
This bronzéd shaft with two fine tips?
Bumble! and does the wind sing true?
He sings a shocking tale of you!
Of willow-wine, and helpless drouth,
And one poor greedy tippling mouth!
And, then, this tell-tale tongue! what needs
More witness? Plain, I fear, *that* pleads
"Guilty!"

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AN INQUEST

Laverock's carols fail,
The young Grass looks very pale,
Willow quivers, shivers, sighs,
Celandines turn up their eyes,
Violets droop the ashaméd head—
O poor Bumble! And you're dead!

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GOLDEN-MOUTH

OUT of the streets I went my way
One grey-ey'd January day.
Suddenly, as I stroll'd along,
A wayside throstle burst out in song.

Long, long months my weary mind
Had conn'd the griefs of humankind;
Care had had my heart to school,
And sear'd it with her iron rule.

But oh! what's this—this strange unrest?
Is the heart turning in my breast?
Oh, mercy! is it joy or pain
Lets the tears rush into my eyes again?

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GOLDEN-MOUTH

And are these wings, my spirit feels?
And are wings growing at my heels?
Something touches me! something gleams!
The air is quick with resurgent dreams!

For, "Love! Love and Life! Oh, back to you!
Trouble's a lie, but ye are true!"—
Now, praise and thanks to my brother the bird—
This was he singing; this I heard!

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SING HAPPILY

I HEARD a Robin from a leafless tree
Sing happily.
A meagre bird in sober suit was he,
Singing a carol of surpassing glee.
Sing happily, Robin, Robin, happily!

No furtive sun hearten'd the heavy sky,
(Sing happily!)
December's churlish wind push'd roughly by,
Earth lay a-dreaming deep with upclosed eye.
(Sing happily, Robin, Robin, happily!)

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SING HAPPILY

A poor wan world, with wintry grief forspent,
(Sing happily!)
Wherein no faintest voice responsive lent
This lonely singer its encouragement.
(Sing happily, Robin, Robin, happily!)

He sang; and after every mellow trill,
Sung happily,
He paus'd; as tho' at heart retracing still
Each utter'd rapture to its inmost thrill,
Oh! happily, Robin, Robin, happily!

He felt no solitude, no chill distress;
(Sing happily!)
Sipping at his own song's deliciousness,
He needed nought, his rich estate to bless.—
Sing happily, Poet, Poet, happily!

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DEATH-IN-LIFE

AWHILE ago I lay down in this place,
Hard by the summit of a heathery hill.
The Autumn afternoon was very still,
All things seem'd melting into sunny space.
I lay long, looking in the sky's dear face,
Wearing my heart away with prayers, until
Nature releas'd me from my weary will,
Gave me sweet Death-in-Life.

O sovereign grace!
Gone is the misty question, "What am I?"
No part of me but in the sunlight shares.
I am become a morsel of blue sky,
A breath among the slowly-sauntering airs,
A tuft of heather, rooted where I lie—
Anything, save a creature that hath cares!

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THE SUMMONS

"LEAVE the broad sunshine, and the pleasant
plain;
Seek thou the o'erclouded height!"
Great was the voice that call'd. I rose, and went
Out from the light
That makes the happy valleys laugh; I left
Glad homes and children's prattle all behind;
And, climbing up the hillside, a sheer cleft,
Pine-clad and dark, did find.

What mystery Divine, what unknown calm
Made awful that dim air!
Twilight's deep wings, laid tenderly above,
Held silence there.
Birds in the valley caroll'd. I lay still.
Vague stirrings of some giant soul possess'd
My soul with its vast Life's tumultuous thrill—
How much more sweet than rest!

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TO NIGHT

WRAP me round with thine arms, O Mother!
Take my head to thy dim, deep bosom,
Dark and mighty Mother of mine.
Rest me a moment—I am tired,
Mother mine!

These dull tears that keep welling, welling,
Kiss them back! And this hard, hot forehead,
Calm and patient Mother of mine,
Let thy cool palm soothe and loosen,
Mother mine!

This heart-aching, these cares, this weakness,
Draw them off—they are harsh and heavy,
Dewy-handed Mother of mine!
Lave me in purity, lap me in freshness,
Mother mine!

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TO NIGHT

Sing, now! Open my spirit's portals
Wide; all the bustling thoughts lure outward,
Dulcet-breathing Mother of mine!
With melodious quiet lull me,
Mother mine!

Sow the dear dreams thick on mine eyelids,
Fold my face in thy neck—O Mother,
Strong and tender Mother of mine;
I am thy child, and thou art my Mother,
Mother mine!

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FIVE PRAYERS

TO taste
Wild wine of the mountain-spring, fresh, living, strong,
Running and rushing like a triumph-song
Round hearts new-braced:

To smell
A growing cowslip, some glad morn of Spring,
And breathe the breath of every fragrant thing
From every bell:

To touch
A sliding wavelet, supple, smooth and thin,—
Just ere the pois'd and perfect crests begin
To bend too much:

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FIVE PRAYERS

To hear
Amid May twilight, by the murmuring sea,
Some blackbird warbling from a budded tree,
Tender and clear:

To see
Down young rose-petals how the deepening light
Glides gradually, till, somewhere out of sight,
What light must be!—

O Thou, intense
Rapture of Beauty! All-pervading Lord!
Is not this worship? So art Thou ador'd
By every sense!

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CHURCH

THE people bent above their books,
And sweetly pray'd the priest,
My heart stay'd frozen by their fire,
And fasted at their feast.

But where the lonely breezes blow
Above the lonely sod,
Where mountain-heads are hid in mist,
My heart was hid with God.

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FORGIVEN

O BLISS too exquisite for song!
I am at peace, my pain is past.
For Nature, holy, sweet and strong,
Hath drawn me back to her at last.

Mother! Loose not thy dear embrace
From thy poor passionate child again!
I could not even dream thy face
In that wild agony of pain.

But, now!—The clouds are roll'd away,
The moon looks lovingly from Heaven.
Thousands of tender voices say,
"Rest now, poor soul! Thou art forgiven!"

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SAINT MARGARET

JUST ere the swell of the down is broken
Sheer by the sea cliff, sky and air
Brood o'er a farmplace bleak and bare,
Where the wind is master; and this is his token—
Two writhen trees, and no more, are there.

You might call it God-forsaken, only
Within her white-wall'd chamber lies
Margaret, gazing thro' the skies,
Or past the sweep of the upland lonely;
Margaret, with the grateful eyes!

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SAINT MARGARET

With yonder harebells, pure and pale,
  How gentle is the rough down made!
  Yet ere October they must fade . . .
—There's another flower, more fair, more frail,
  Will first upon God's knee be laid.

And ah! the wheat has finish'd turning
  Her waves of green to waves of gold,
  Rich light is swimming round stalk and fold,
The fields with a ruddy joy are burning
  —And all the August suns are told.

Already the mellow mists do creep
  Upon the pasture, soft and slow.
  The air they soothe with dreamy glow,
The sky they lull to tranquil sleep
  —And Summer steals away, tiptoe.

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SAINT MARGARET

The noon-sun's finger turns the moss
A-bask on the barn-roof, golden-green;
The ricks are bright with paly sheen;
The treetops rustle not, nor toss;
All is silent, still, serene.

Only the swallows flit and flicker
Rapidly, rapidly, round and round,
Now fanning the straws on the court-yard ground
With smooth down-swoop, now quicker and quicker
Pulsing up with a strong rebound.

Margaret, at her window lying,
Studies this ripening world outside,
This book before her open'd wide;
Looks for help in this strange pass—Dying;
Sees; and lies there, satisfied!

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SAINT MARGARET

The wise words in the printed books
  Dazzle her mind, till it cannot see;
  A simple, ignorant girl is she;
But, here, in Nature's heart she looks,
  And finds there—God, immediately.

God smiles at her in the austere sweet gloaming
  That muffles the feet of the coming dawn;
  God's hand smoothes out the fair long morn;
God rides the waters, thro' all their roaming,
  And hangs the cool stars over the corn.

'Twas God that bade the downs outspread
  All their heart to the large-ey'd sky.
  —In ceaseless worship do they lie
With ever His puissance overhead
  Mirror'd in their humility:

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For, when the sun is over-brimming
  Heaven's chalice of profoundest blue,
  The downs run o'er with rapture, too;
Their russet cup hath a golden rimming,
  And Glory swings in the grass like dew:

But the grey clouds, with their daylong weeping
  Droop o'er lonely stretches vast
  With mute mournfulness o'ercast—
Till Comfort on amber wings comes leaping
  Out of the evening sky at last:

And when, thro' folds of violet cloud
  Steals forth a vague pathetic sense,
  Like some hid grief's half-evidence,
The downs, like one to patience vow'd
  Wait, in a sober, meek suspense:—

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SAINT MARGARET

Till Margaret, o'er the page God-given
Musing with love-illumin'd mind,
Reads this amid the lettering twined:
"As the look of the downs to the look of heaven,
My will to Thine, Lord, be resign'd!"

—Often the bees' low song, enwove
With sunbeams and warm clover-scent,
Floats in, a balmy murmurment,
That laps her in a sense of love,
An idle sense of blank content:

Till down the quicken'd air comes pouring
Ecstasy, rapture infinite!
Her eyes flash open, wet and bright.
"Oh! can you see Him in your soaring?
Skylark! I wish He were in sight!

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Or she will gaze where, far away,
Clasp'd in an amethystine zone,
The sea and sky melt into one.
"Something's behind that!" she will say,
"And *there*, I think, must be His Throne."

By day she watches, fair and smooth,
The amethyst sea-water shine;—
By night she hears its voice, benign,
Mighty, a voice to calm and soothe.
"Father!" she murmurs, "sure 'tis Thine!"

But when the stars come too, and sing
Strange, high hymns, and wingèd beams
Troop in to vigil round her dreams,
One cry all thro' her heart doth ring:
"God! Thou art everywhere, it seems!"

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SAINT MARGARET

Ah, love! Let others reach salvation
Thro' tears and consciousness of sin;
God hath His way each heart to win.
Nature He made thy Revelation,
Held out her hand, and led thee in!

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IRELAND

LAND of the hidden sun,
Poor land of pensive skies,
—Between whose long grey lids
Glide out long golden eyes:

Land of tyrannic cloud,
—Betray'd by peeping blue,
Where, from her huddled rags,
The native Heaven laughs thro':

Land of drear noons, with roof
And quaking walls of rain,
—Issuing on royal eves,
Pure fire without one stain:

God spread and spread thy light,
God thrust thy clouds apart,
Land of the tear-fill'd eyes,
Land of the laughing heart!

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TRAFALGAR SQUARE

STRONG isle of stillness 'mid a roaring Sea!
Like some great Queen thy solitude doth stand,
Deigning with quiet majesty and grand
To front these wild waves of Humanity.
How proud a privilege is granted thee!
All round thou see'st the mighty flood expand,
Hear'st its hoarse voice of thunderous command,
Know'st all its power; yet from that power art free!

Man's joy, Man's woe, his hunger and his wealth,
For ever art thou contemplating these;
Yet still thy fountains fill the air with health,
Above the glaring pavement dream thy trees.
—Could but my soul, herself as free from strife,
As fully face each fact of human life!

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SPRING IN LONDON

THERE'S one that calleth in the street,
Merry of voice, named Wickedness.
And many a man will push and grope
His way towards a sound so sweet.
—Later, the sense thereof no less,
He hears: "There is no Hope!"

One croucheth by, fordone with woe.
All know her—she is Suffering.
The winds wax clammy cold as Death,
While, shuddering, thro' her rags they go.
Sharp her unsobbing voice doth ring:
"There is no Hope!" she saith.

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SPRING IN LONDON

Day after day, and night by night,
  Upon me, sitting all alone,
    Beats the double desperate cry.
Till champion Faith is put to flight,
  And 'mid my fences overthrown,
    "There's no Hope!" mutter I.

—So last night. . . . But to-day, to-day,
  Each pool in the street is an eye of blue,
Buoyant with Spring is the smoky air,
  And a girl sells daffodils, over the way.—
    Why should not everything come new?
      Thank God! Hope's everywhere!

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THE TERRACE

"Mentem mortalia tangunt."

THE Terrace is full of sun,
And holds warm air.
Invalids, day by day,
Take refuge there.

Here stands one in his prime,
And begs for breath.
Yonder a fair girl walks
In step with Death.

Children move here on crutches;
Some, not at all.
None are too grown to be ill,
And none too small.—

—Among the dying babies
And dying men,
The merry crocuses bloom;
Spring's back again!

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DIVES AND LAZARUS

I WANDER thro' the streets, and see
  The poor man and the rich;
But I am sure that God alone
  Knows rightly which is which.—

—There was an old man once, who bore
  A tray of wither'd fruit;
It snow'd; and people hurried by,
  Deaf to his quavering suit.

Last, by a lit wide-window'd shop
  With doubled prayers he plied
One who, alas! like all the rest
  Unheeding, pushed inside,

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DIVES AND LAZARUS

Where the pinch'd face against the glass
  Might watch him fling down gold
For a few flowers, that all would be
  Dust ere the week was old.

Then turned the beggar to the cur
  That shivering by him stood:
"Ay, Mick! yon lad has gold for flowers;
  We haven't pence for food!"

But ah! those instant-lifted eyes,
  How loving, patient, true!
Till Love in those down-cast cried out
  "Right, friend! I *have* got you!"

—He of the rare load, coming home,
  Upon a cold still bed
Cast it, with tears. He, too, had had
  One friend. She lay there, dead.

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DIVES AND LAZARUS

—I wander through the streets, and see
The poor man and the rich,
And sure I am that God alone
Knows rightly which is which!

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RENAISSANCE

WHAT strange device is this of Fate's, that thou,
Being such, in such a time, to such an earth
Art born, O damsel of the unruffled brow?
Sure, in a stately age long-past, thy birth
Must have made glad some lordly palace-pile
In some far dreamy city of the South,
Whose languid grace yet lingers in thy smile
And curves the corners of thy pouted mouth,
Sunbeams less shy than ours have kiss'd that cheek
Into its changeful almond-petal bloom,
And play'd their mazy game of hide-and-seek
'Mid those crisp tresses; till a sudden doom
Fasten'd them there, for ever to abide,
To lave thy brow in floods of radiant light,
Or soft adown thy shoulder's dimpled side
Dance out a dazzling brede of gold and white.

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RENAISSANCE

—Yea, cloistered round with old red crumbling
wall,
On marble steps methinks I see thee stand,
Erect and gracious, young and fair and tall,
Holding sweet purple violets in thy hand!

Yet as I gaze, rejoicing,—ah, behold!
Is there not spread a warm blue sky afloat
Above thee, and beneath thee? From the gold
Of those rough-rippling locks, thy dulcet throat,
All lilywhite and clear, leans yearningly
Along the blue; thy face is full of dreams,
Pensive, mysterious, very sweet to see!
And, thro' the bright air flashing brighter beams,
Lo! from each pure-curv'd shoulder a white
wing
Upleaping, for a veil that thou mayst spread
Before thy face, in that high communing
When God's own voice rings round thine awe-
struck head.

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RENAISSANCE

Star-bright thou standest on the sapphire floor,
And, floating round thee cloud-like, soft as love,
Fair many-folded raiment eddies o'er
Thy white feet, lifted as in act to move.

I know thee now! Thou art that angel dear
Whom Perugino saw, so long ago,
And never tir'd of limning. Prison'd here
Thou art, in this deep dungeon-world of woe,
This dreariness, that men call daily life.
Alas! thou hast forgone thy visions blest.
Where are thy wings? Like us, with sin, with strife,
Like us with littleness, thou art oppress'd!

Fate! Shall I bless or curse thee, who ordain'd
So dim a setting for a gem so rare—
Made woman of an Angel, yet retain'd
The Angel's halo in the woman's hair?

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DETHRONED, RETHRONED

THE pride of rooted majesty,
  The splendid pride of lordliness
Stamp'd with the right imperial die—
Most royal in adversity,
  Most radiant in distress—
To-day beside the sea-waves wild
I found it, in a beggar-child.

She sings upon the beach for hire;
  The vivid mirth across her face,
Her Creole eyes of night and fire,
The boldness of her bright attire,
  Daily suffuse the place;
Light the dull ground, re-light the air,
And lure a ring of gazers there.

To whom she croons a curious strain,
  Lawless, outlandish, eerie, sweet;—

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DETHRONED, RETHRONED

Not till she ends that wild refrain
Her thralls can catch their breath again,
  And feel their bosoms beat.
So every day, with merry din,
Her revenues come clattering in.

And yesterday they did not fail
  But ah! to-day Dolores found
A stranger, squalid, gaunt and pale,
Screaming a scrannel ditty stale
  On her peculiar ground.
And just as thickly stood the ring
To hear the newer singer sing!

Then 'mid the ring, with face unstirr'd,
  With unabash'd considerate mien,
Leaving the whisper'd jeers unheard,
Appraising but the sway preferr'd,
  Stood she, the cast-off Queen;
Nor claimed again her wrested sway,
But listen'd—look'd—and turn'd away.

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And climbing a near stairway steep,
  There, O the wonder! poised elate,
With eyes that danced, and yet were deep
With secrets that they scarce could keep,
  Alone, aloft, she sate;
And with serene contentment view'd
Poor rival and fond multitude!—

—She sees her gold and purple gay
  Its undull'd flutter round her make;
She hears, within, her music play
Unmarr'd—and her whole soul can say,
  "It is but a mistake!
Tho' at her feet my pennies fall,
I am the *right* one, after all!"

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TWILIGHT BY THE SEA

ABOVE the weary world is spread
A sky of gentle grey,
And Eve's unhasting footstep creeps
Across the quiet bay.
The waves along the beach
Plash ever, each on each.

The cliff s defiant brow takes on
A tenderer look ; the wail
Of the wild sea-birds dies away ;
Sleep folds her gradual veil
Earth's tired eyes around,
But still the seawaves sound.

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TWILIGHT BY THE SEA

The daisies purse their petals up,
The lambs to shelter creep;
Man, putting off his toil, puts on
The nothingness of sleep.
Still, still upon the shore
The waves their music pour.

Deep grows the dusk. You cannot see
One crest or column shine.
Yet still the unceasing voice on voice
Attests the unending line
Of homebound waves that come
Surely and safely home.

Ay, waves so many! and not one,
O'er trackless leagues and vast
By nature sent to seek the shore,
But finds the shore at last!
—God! God! would men were free
With no less liberty!

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A MARCH EVENING

THE night steals down upon the sea,
Mystery unto mystery.
So late? And we are due at home,
Rover, ere night be fully come!
Whew! Bitter blows the wind and shrill,
As we turn inland, up the hill
With its one cottage—snug, no doubt,
Inside, but grim and grey without;
Save where yon line of light shoots thro'
The good green shutter, half-pull'd to
On father's meal and tiny prayers
Said in the warmth to-night downstairs;
God bless them!
Ay, but does *she* wait,
Quit fire and lamp, and sigh, "He's late!"
To the cold pane? Come on, lad!

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A MARCH EVENING

Here
Glimmers our path, still vaguely clear,
The little rutted chalky way
That none, I'll warrant, all the day
Has trod, save us. On either hand
The dim, pathetic downs expand,—
Patches of wan and whiten'd green,
Or purple where the plough has been,
And tawny hillocks. Not a sound,
Save, somewhere rustling near the ground,
A homeward lark; and, far behind,
A great voice vanquishing the wind—
The Sea's.
All else is near asleep.
No daring star makes shift to peep
Twixt these wild massy clouds that fly
So fast along the pallid sky.
Only the lighthouse beacon streams
Athwart the night in two bright beams
That lonelier make the dark.

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A MARCH EVENING

Ah—hush!
What moved? What's all that sudden rush
Of something white—can those be lambs?
They glimmer 'mid their scarce-seen dams
Like baby-ghosts. . . . And now a warm
Sweet whiff of hay . . . the half-way farm
Must be at hand; but where's the light?
Ah, there. . . . And now 'tis past. The night
Is on us. The black world around
Lies steep'd in loneliness profound.
We plod a mile, and do not speak.

. . . A stinging scud of rain! And bleak
And bleaker comes the wind, with whirls
That choke one, and wild whoops and skirls
Worrying one mad. . . . How foolish! Yet
You, too, begin to whine and fret,
Rover! What is it? Just the storm?
Or can you scent some fiendish form

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A MARCH EVENING

Prowling ahead? Get on! you slink
Too close. Now, were we near the brink
Instead of safe inland . . . What! Hark! . . .
One's ear is dull'd by all this dark. . . .
Can that be—surf? . . .
. . . The night so black—
The cliff-track for the homeward-track—
Death in the dark, and no farewell—
My God! . . .
Look! look! the hideous spell
Breaks! Ay, lad, bark and run! All's past!
Home and the lodestar face at last,
The lifted lamp, the door held wide;
"My dearest!" and the night's outside!

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GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY

THE cart is ready; come! . . . Oh, is it true?
Gaffer, dear Gaffer, can't you hear me cry?
Must the old place call out, instead of you,
"Good-bye"?

Ah, sure, 'tis only market-day at Shere;
We've only tuck'd you in all snug to go
With Polly that you've harness'd, Gaffer, dear. . . .
No! no!

Never again you'll yoke her at the door!
Never, but this once, take the market-track!
And oh! you'll never, never any more
Come back!

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GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY

. . . You're all alone. Tho' we trudge on beside
(All of us but poor Pincher), one by one,
And Granny often stumbles: yet you ride
Alone.

. . . *You* need no gaiters, tho' the roads be mire;
Your old blue cloak's at home, despite the rain;
We needn't be afraid you'll ever tire
Again.

. . . 'Tis market-day, we're all for Shere, and yet
There's not one word among so many souls.
But, straight ahead, a bell one can't forget
Tolls, tolls. . . .

Stop, yon's the village! Lay the holly-greens
Upon the lid . . . lift him . . . with bated
breath
Bear him along, and reverence! Oh, this means
Death!

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GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY

Gaffer! this change to you that shrank from
change,
That liked things every-day, not new and odd!
Oh, do not let him find Heaven very strange,
Please, God!

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BARBARA

I

I SAW three ships go sailing,
And two I've seen come back;
A ship of war, and a merchant ship,—
And the third was a fisher-smack.

The first is back with glory,
The next with treasure stor'd.—
But the little smack, she'll ne'er be back,
That had my love aboard.

II

Seven riding-lights but now;
Now, only three.
And still creeps the sheeted fog
Across the numb sea.

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A night's fog for the fisher-boats,
  A night's fog for the sea—
Night on night, day on day
  A life's fog for me.

III

North I turn, but never his face I find;
  South,—but it is not there!
Night cannot lull my sorrow asleep, nor dawn
  Awaken my despair.

But, oft-times, twixt the rim of the dying day,
  And the rim of the darkening sea,
Hope spies the pearly gleam of that far-off Sail,
  Will give him back to me!

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THE POOL AND THE KINGFISHER

A DEEP Pool lay within a forest dark.
No grass grew on its brim,
No sun, no swallow knew the place; it was
Vacant and drear and dim.

Thither, one day, a gem-bright Kingfisher
O, as the blue seas bright!
Swept, with a flash that waked the swooning air,
And smote the dark to light.

And the sad Pool rejoiced, and said: "At last
Comes lightly to my breast
The natural lord of its unrifled deeps,—
And O, the glorious Guest!

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THE POOL AND THE KINGFISHER

"Now my perpetual pall of murky days
What secret Sun will line!
Now all my shadows shall with light be sped,
Or, lingering, learn to shine.

"And ye, charged Clouds, ye shall but gladden me
Now, with your rainbow rain!"
—The Bird was flying to his nest, far off,
And never came again.

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NAXOS

WHEN lonely on the once-delightful shore
Stood Ariadne, and the stern wind blew
Steadily seaward, till at last she knew
Theseus could come no more:

Behold, a God, a God rush'd to her side!—
—Think you she cared? I know which way she turn'd
Fain eyes, and longing heart, and lips that burn'd;
I know which name she cried!

For now the Godlike lot draws near to me;
Yea, Love-of-one denied, comes Love-for-all,—
But, where art *thou*? Canst thou not hear me call,
O lost, lost Love, to thee?

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LUSTLEIGH CLEAVE

THIS is a haunt of Peace! This room,
  Like some still convent-cell
White-wall'd and innocently bare,
  Knoweth her presence well.

Her breath hath touch'd this quiet air,
  Her hand these quiet rills;
Her kiss yet lingers at the heart
  Of these shy daffodils.

As fields with dew, yon spacious sky
  Is sooth'd with her decree;
These open-hearted lonely hills
  Are made her sanctuary.

O that so consecrate and calm'd,
  O that so sure a shrine,
So purposéd and so fulfill'd
  Were this hot heart of mine!

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THE ISHMAELITE

SOME men have souls like gardens,—
  Fair plots of fruitful ground,
Smooth lawns and ways well-order'd,
With chosen blossoms border'd,
  And walls to fence them round.

O still and safe and fragrant!
  Kind homes of peace and love!
All things uncouth excluding,
Free only to the brooding
  Of the great sky above!

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THE ISHMAELITE

'Tis said, by Angel-footsteps
  Such garden-paths are trod—
Angels, the sky forsaking,
Tend every blossom, making
  A pleasure-place for God.

—I have walk'd in some such garden.
  How well it was, how meet!
Yet, down each alley shining,
With tears I wander'd, pining
  For wild things round my feet!

Sweeter than thrush or robin,
  To me, the seagull's scream;
Fairer the blacken'd heather
That fronts the bleak moor-weather,
  Than that soft garden-dream.

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THE ISHMAELITE

Oh, peace is not so precious,
Perchance, as is distress!
Forbid Thine Angels, Father,
To tend me—keep Thou rather
One unwall'd wilderness!

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THE NEIGHBOUR

["Ἵν' αὐτὸς ἦν πρόσουρος."—*Sophocles.*]

"LONELY, lonely, O life!" I said,
"This path thou givest me to tread,
Sadly I watch my fellow-kind
Along the level roadway wind,
Step mating step, and arms entwined.
I from my uphill rut may see
How readily, for weal, for woe,
They win and render sympathy;
But I for ever friendless go"—
Saith a small voice: "Oh, say not so!
Hast thou not me?"

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THE NEIGHBOUR

"Give me but leave to play my part,
And be consoled, thou sick at heart!
Ay, upon dreary errands sent
With wrested will, and footsteps bent
Into a byway, be content!
One is but one, two make a world;
And two may laugh where one must weep.
Whither is bubble Sorrow whirl'd
When half is given a friend to keep?
Give me my half, whose life so deep
In thine lies furl'd!

"Hast heavy trouble? I, too, bear it!
Fugitive joy? Yet I, too, share it!
The dull ache of the listless sense,
The fretted fire, the want immense,
The rending passion, the pang intense—
Friend! I know all their influence,
Comrade! take heart!"

Digitized by Google

THE NEIGHBOUR

O subtle bliss,
O Hope, thro' desolation stealing
Like water thro' a wilderness
With comfort and delicious healing!
Who renders me such fellow-feeling?
—My own self 'tis!

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HOME

I

BACK from the world of strangers,
From exile drear I come.
It is as tho' these mountains
Had been my earliest home.

For all the pines and pastures,
And all the snows above,
And all the blue beyond them,
Sing; and their song is Love.

And all the peasant-faces
Are brother-faces to me;
For this is Home—with Nature,
And love, and liberty!

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II

THE FIRST NIGHT

AS I lay last night musing,
A sweet and subtle sense
O'erspread my heart, like music
Contenting long suspense.

I felt as a little bud may,
On the topmost twig of a tree
Held up amid the moonlight
God's open sky to see.

All my harsh cares grew tender,
My heavy cares grew light,
When Nature came to my bedside
And kiss'd her child "good-night!"

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HOME

III

The First Morning

THE sun rushes in at my lattice,
And kisses the white walls gold;
Into my heart he rushes,
And kisses away the cold.

The trees are ringing with rapture;
The rivulet, blithe as they,
With bubbles of song is splashing
The little laughing Day.

And there's clean, clean breath for every one,
There's the breath of life for me!
For the city is turn'd to country,
And the prose to poesy!

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COTTAGE DAYS

I

AS small winds at a window
With just as little art,
These gusts of song come calling
At the casement of your heart

Open a tiny chink in it,
And let them in, I pray!
They will but throw a country kiss
To you—and run away.

II

THE STUDY

MY room has bare white walls,
—So every sunbeam bright
Runs naked round my room
In unoffended light.

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My room has bare white walls
—So, if a daffodil
Is yellow, in my room
She shows quite yellow still.

To give each thought full scope
And every fact its due,
Perhaps the mind of man
Should go uncolour'd too?

III

THE CONCERT

This gusty morning comes with gifts
Of music to my room:
She bids the Wind to ring in the roof,
And in the chimney boom;

She marshals thick at my window-pane
The reedy Raindrop choir;
And calls for wood, to whistle the songs
Of last year to the fire;

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And (like a Starling, venturing notes
That to the Thrush belong),
Me too in this singing world she sets
Crooning my little song.

IV

Little Boy and Little Girl

HE is an apple-blossom,
All gentle pink and white,
With a bit of blue sky in either eye
To keep it happy and bright;

And she, a wild March violet,
The daughter of wind and rain;
That flings you the bliss of a fragrant kiss—
And snatches it back again!

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COTTAGE DAYS

V

ROAD-SONGS

1

WORRY me, Wind, and vex me, Rain,
And use me as you will;
But, should the Sun come out again,
He'll find me singing still!

2

To walk bare-headed, making songs
And shouting them at the wind,
May bring a headache—but it leaves
A healthy heart behind!

3

Why should these tiny breaths of air
Sigh, as they push along?
Can it be, every one of *them*
Is burden'd with a song?

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VI

THE DEBT

O PLOUGHBOY with the purple eyes
That are so strangely clear,
Did you make all the little songs
I meet so often here?

Is it from out your singing heart
That into mine they come?
And are they flying to my lips
Because they found yours dumb?

And is that why you look at me
Half friendly, half in shame?
(And twice you stopp'd and spoke to me,
And once you ask'd my name.)

Brother! should they indeed be yours,
And this my fancy true—
Hark how they do but leave my lips
To flutter home to you!

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COTTAGE DAYS

VII

THE FAREWELL

AT this lock'd door of past delights,
  Towards my tranquil singing cell,
My minstrel days, and minstrel nights,
  Turning, I pause to say "Farewell!"
O dawns of dewy grey, that broke
  On throstles singing in the dark!
  O firelit evenings, when what spark
Fell! and what long-dead flame awoke,
  What prison'd bird within me sang
  Till in my heart the rafters rang!
Silence creeps close; once more the drowsy spell
Falls—falls. O swift and sudden Song, farewell!

Farewell, dear neighbours, ten days past
  Unhoped—by your quick courtesies,
  Your swift upleaping sympathies,
Bound now unto Regret, how fast!
  To all the faithful homely care

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That of kind tones and friendly ways
Almost too natural for praise
Serv'd daily such unstinted fare,
And pillow'd every night my head
On pleasantness remembered,
Must now "Do not forget!" be said!
And you, my human blossoms twain,
My little maid, my little man,
Give me that good-bye kiss again,
And me remember—while you can!
My playtime now is over, and Heart's-rest
Retain no longer may her random guest.

Nature, farewell! O frolic showers
Free winds, and childish-ey'd Spring flowers,
Wide wings of Heaven undefiled,
Fallows, and airy-headed down,
O, all things simple, all things wild,
Farewell! Once more the scarce-trod track,
The chance good-greeting must I lack;
Must to the thick confusion of the town

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And to its loneliness, once more go back!
—Yet, as I turn away, and take my load,
To go (not singing now) the dust-deep road,
Surely a little richer is my store
And yet my burden lighter than before?
Music was mine! whereof some piecèd stave,
Tho' sad miswrit, yet in my hand I have;
A word or two of Nature's in mine ear,
In my regard her blessed look more clear,
Deep in my breast the love of her more dear!
  Ay, and to this delicious gratitude,
This heartier grip on human brotherhood,
If it may be, the surer sight of eyes
  A little less averted from life's whole.
(Quicker to spy out Beauty in disguise,
  Keener to note how lowliest lives may be
  Nests for the heavenward laverock, Poesy),
The heart more warm, I hope the humbler soul
  To such delights farewell I need not say;
  These are my cottage-gifts, to take away!

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TO LIFE

O LIFE, mysterious! looking down
On me, with pregnant brows that frown,
Lock'd lips that smile:
I ask not what is meted me,
The issues of my destiny
If proud or vile;

Sorrow, or joy, my course control—
What matter? so thou grant my soul
Sure sight and keen;
That she may throughly penetrate
Each curse, each blessing; soon or late
Grasp all they mean!

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THE BRINK OF BATTLE

YON mute grandeur of the midnight Heaven
  Hangs like some dread destiny o'erhead.
Earth is dumb with awe, the air is stricken
  Voiceless; light is over, day is dead.
Only do my footsteps break the silence,
  Trampling peace beneath their restless tread;

Only do my thoughts go whirling, whirling,
  'Mid the stillness in tempestuous rush,
Like a thousand emulous warriors surging
  Heavily against this world-wide hush—
Heavily! O God! have they not power
  Twenty human hearts like mine to crush?

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THE BRINK OF BATTLE

What is it that arms them? Is it sorrow
  Or remorse has made their shafts so keen?
Have their arrows drunk of foil'd ambition's
  Bitter poison? Or hath mad doubt been
Forger of their weapons? Neither; only
  This same quiet, plain accustom'd scene.

Just these four red walls, this closed quadrangle!
  Nothing lovely in it, saving peace,
Save security, and unstorm'd shelter.
  O harsh world, O pain that cannot cease,
Even ere your fetters fasten round me,
  Cries my captive heart: "Release! Release!"

Cries, and sickens with a desperate longing,
  Even now, in thought of what will be,
For this vision of pure calm untroubled.
  Eyes of mine! look, drink it in, O see
Everything, miss nothing! This may solace
  (Who knows?) days and nights of misery.

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THE BRINK OF BATTLE

—Moonlight suddenly! And behold! above me
Shine the four stone Faces, white and stern,
From the dark wall: Molière, and Dante,
Æschylus and Shakespeare—souls that yearn
Still, perhaps, for love and light and knowledge,
Or, perhaps,—who knows what they discern?

They lived once on earth, these men, with foreheads
Stamp'd by some high quest's tremendous toil,
And wide eyes, intent to pierce the darkness
With an earnestness no fear could foil.
Ay, and, living, to what pain, what terror,
Paid their hearts the tribute of recoil?

Yet how fathomless, O God! the anguish
Needed to produce Thee souls so grand!
They accepted all; and from my pittance
Dare I shrink? No, never! from Thy hand,
See! I snatch my orders to Life's battle,
Seize my chance to suffer and to stand!

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PEBBLES

PEBBLES, pebbles by the sea,
Is it, I wonder, better to be
Snatch'd away by the hurrying waves,
Swallow'd down to the rolling caves,
Where the mad water wrestles and raves:
Dash'd upon rocks, champ'd amid foam,
Toss'd and turn'd,
Trampled and churn'd,
Spued out at last on the self-same shore,
Flung back awhile to the self-same home,
—Not the same pebbles as before!
But smooth'd and rounded and jewel bright,
A line of laughter, a dance of light,
The shore's glory, the sun's delight:

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Or is it better, high and dry
Out of the great sea's reach to lie?
  Night by night and day by day
  From the wild waves hid away:
  On a landward ledge to stay,
Never fretted, jostled, hurl'd
                With a jarring crash,
                And a sharp splash,
From the surety and the peace
Of your never-changing world:
Comfortable, safe, at ease:
—Sore to the eye, sharp to the hand,
Stark upon the weary strand
Like bleach'd bones in an unslaked land?

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HILL DUTIFUL

[" . . . Since it is the will of God that thou shouldst learn to bear tribulation without consolation. . . ." *Imitation of Christ*.]

THERE was a Traveller I beheld one day;
Down in a valley, wrapt in dreams, he lay.
Before his closéd eyelids, sheer and sharp,
Torn into peak and chasm and jagged scarp,
A mighty mountain from the vale uprose.

He slept; but from that sleep of scant repose,
Broken by frequent start and fitful sigh,
Woke, as I watch'd, with a most bitter cry:
"Rest! Rest! O thou wild brain, and beating breast,
What will assuage this torment? O for rest!"
(I heard the mountain-echo answer: "Rest!")

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Then, on the mountain fixing dazéd eyes
All pale with pain, and groping with maim'd hand
Upon the unhelpful earth, half did he rise,
Half dragg'd himself to where the first rocks stand,
The mountain-foot, firm-fixt amid the sand;
Groaning: "No rest for me! So sore bestead,
Surely some little rest might have been mine?
Poor wretch! these limbs to battle up yon dread
Shelterless road, and yon star-piercing line
O'erstep, and not one moment's anodyne?—
Lo! I but craved one meagre moment's sleep,
And rent it was to visions wild and vague,
Spectres and shades of yon unending steep!
Ay, slumber's self for me is turn'd a plague;
Dim are mine eyes with watching; my hands bleed,
Dull languor loads my feet and weary brain;
And I have none to cry to in my need,
None with whose help I might take heart again.
Would Death were come! since Life is nought
but pain."

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He ceas'd. Throughout the great plain, far
and wide,
Silence. Throughout the sky and lonely air,
Silence. There was not any that replied;
And Death, for all his ranging, came not there.

. . . What stirred him? For at length his
hands laid hold
Upon the toothed rock. His nerveless feet
Trail'd on the scorching sand, dizzily roll'd
His head aside, and all that heavy heat
Of valley-mist hung on him—none the less
He grasp'd the rock, groaning for pain, and drew
His body slowly up with hard distress.
That day the barren rock drank blood for dew.

On, on, and ever upward! Till I thought:
"The man, poor fool, so weak he is, and blind,
Must fall, in chilly Vertigo's clutches caught—
Meet fate," I said, "for such a maniac mind!"

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Yet he climb'd on, and fell not; high and higher
He climb'd, and scaled the first peak's slippery
spire.
Then I, far down the valley, heard his cry
Come strongly piercing thro' the lazy air,
And heard it in amaze: "Happy am I,
That am escaped out of the subtle snare!"
The shuddering valley-vapour shrank in fear
And fled, before that voice elate and clear;
His every word came sharply to mine ear.

"Blessed be this keen wind, that frees my brain
From torturing phantoms! Blessed each rough crag
That lets me feel thro' every tingling vein
Life strongly throb! No more my footsteps flag,
They dread no more their journey—'tis begun!
And plain the path, 'neath this unsoften'd sun!

"Blessed am I, with none that may console,
No stalwart friend to travel at my side!

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So have I learn'd mine own steps to control,
Myself is made unto myself a guide.
On! on! with living limbs, and eyes that see;
Out of my weakness, strength is come to me!"

Then rose he from his resting-place and went,
Still climbing; not, 'tis certain, without fears,
Not without woe and black bewilderment.
That steep must still grow steeper as it nears
The far-off summit, and the end appears.

"Yea, at the end of all, what found he?" Friend,
I know not; I have never seen the end.

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LIGHT AND NIGHT

LIGHT! Light! Light!
Mother of the wide-ey'd flowers,
Mother of glad lips and bright
Dancing feet of the noontide hours,
Dancing with delight!
Oh, the joy, the rapture strong,
Thrilling thro' the entrancéd air,
When thy glory rides along
Heaven's high rampart bare!
Mother of ecstasy, Mother of might,
Come, sweet Light!

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LIGHT AND NIGHT

Light, fierce Light!
O intolerable gaze,
O unstay'd insatiate blight,
Battening thy relentless blaze
On the roots of sight!
Mercy! Mercy! Mind and heart
Writhe beneath the unswerving fire!
Mercy, mercy, Light! Depart,
Thou first-begot of Ire!
O for dulness, darkness, Night!
Hence, dread Light!

Darkness dear!
Come, Consoler, softly laying,
Over parched lives and sere,
Dusk of dewy pinions, saying,
"Rest ye! I am here."

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LIGHT AND NIGHT

Hands lie folded, hearts grow deep,
Thro' hot eyelids, many a tear,
Balmy, gradual, doth creep,
Heralds of the cool-hand Sleep
Gliding slowly near.
What hath Peace to do with Light?
Come, sweet Night

Darkness drear!
Dungeon vast of voiceless gloom!
Blindfold, deaf and dumb with fear,
Like stark corpses in a tomb
Mouldering, lie we here;
While the stealthy blackness winds
Wormlike round each rotting limb,
And with slimy torpor binds
Mildew'd hearts and stagnant minds
In corruption grim.
Mercy! Give us mercy, Night!
Give us Light!

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LIGHT AND NIGHT

Nay, but what shall satisfy?
—This: the swift alternate racing
When the sunlit shadows fly
From the shadowy sunlight's chasing
Footsteps following nigh.
Broken darkness, broken light,
Knowledge knit with mystery,
Glory temper'd with a sigh—
Man's inconstant spirit-sight
Needs a shifting sky;
Joy, with sorrow; wrong, with right;
Light, with Night!

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THE BRIAR-ROSE

(After the Picture-series by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.)

'TIS the latest day of the latest year,
And the latest hour of the latest day.
The wan light swooneth as with fear
Around Truth's prison hoary-grey;
Sweet Lady, she, and loved right dear—
But ah, the Briars,
The Thorns and Briars!

And to-night the stealthy Briars mean death
To Truth so long in thraldom pent;
This night, to suck her struggling breath
The last malignant shoot is sent.

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THE BRIAR-ROSE

And where is the love that delivereth
From the cunning Briars,
The clinging Briars?

Many have loved her, in many a guise,
From many a realm of heart and soul;
Each and all with one wisdom wise,
For they turn'd their steps to the one same goal,
One quest deepen'd their wistful eyes—
But (oh, the Briars,
The mighty Briars!)

One was the guerdon Fate decreed!
—Still, still, the unpenetrated walls
Lie safe (alas! may none succeed?)
Safe! and a foul joy writhes and crawls
In them that on the dead men feed,
The lusty Briars,
The full-fed Briars.

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THE BRIAR-ROSE

Day dies ; Truth dies! But who is this?
O warrior, O latecoming Knight,
Welcome! . . . Ah, will he win or miss?
Calm are those eyes that burn so bright,
Helm'd are those brows with stedfastness,
Take heed, ye Briars,
Ye flaunting Briars!

See! see! what tho' his hand is torn,
His lifted face with bloodstains wet,
What tho' the thirsty spikes of thorn
Weave him a ghastly carcanet—
Steadily are his footsteps set
Amid the Briars,
And thro' the Briars. . . .

O glorious Knight, securely brave!
Gain'd is the great oak door at last! . . .
Now anew he buffets the biting wave. . . .
The porch is pass'd, and the courtyard pass'd.

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Yet round him—Christ! how the Briars rave,
The snaky Briars,
The venom'd Briars!

Now he treadeth the first high hall,
Where Judge and Poet, Scholar and King,
Loll in the web of a subtle thrall,
Stifled by wreaths that catch and cling.
Ay, catch and cling, for ye soon shall fall,
Ye cozening Briars,
Ye choking Briars!

What of the inner chamber there? . . .
O pitiful chamber, place of ruth!
Paven all with maidens fair,
Strewn with the bodyguard of Truth,
Caught, at her door, in the dreamy snare
Of the kissing Briars,
The smothering Briars!

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THE BRIAR-ROSE

Ah, Wisdom and fair Innocence,
  Bound so fast in easeless ease!
Yet, holy heart, and love immense,
  Linger not here to succour these;
Love Truth before her votaries!
                On, thro' the Briars,
                  The desperate Briars!

Oh, falter not, but set her free!
  Break, break the Briars that round her twine!
Pierce they thy heart? What's that to thee?
  Welcome thou death, so life may shine
From Truth's eyes, lifted gloriously
                O'er the blossom'd Briars,
                  The sweet Rose-Briars!

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COMFORT

WE are as clouds that flit across the moon
And vanish soon.
From Night we pass a moment into Light,
Then, into Night.

—What matter? Clouds and moon, all heaven and earth,
Being little worth,
Pass. But what's valuable remaineth sure;
God doth endure!

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A NORTHERN MÆNAD

COMRADE! Comrade!
Pinetrees, have you seen my Comrade?
Have ye seen him, gentle beeches?
In and out the lonely woodland
Still I follow, still he flies.

Wherefore fly
Heart of hearts? Ah, Face of faces,
Wherefore wilt thou hide? Yet, hidden,
Look upon my face—it withers,
And my heart it dies, for thee!

The brown bracken
Droops; the bark falls off the branches;
Crush the moss, my feet! For crushen,
Cast-off, dead, I wander; unsought,
Undesir'd, not recognised!

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Yet, with low moss
Heavenly dews do house, bright sunbeams
Swim i' the bark, yea, winds the faded
Bracken woo. But me—Ah, Death, Death,
In my hand even thine lies loose!

Ah, but once!—
The Spring dawn . . . the touch . . . the
whisper . . .
Oh, the dread! and tears a many,
Blinding—till the leafy branches
Quiver'd yet, but thou wast flown!

Ah, once more!
The blue summer-night, . . . the woodward
Chamber singing to the passing
Of thy wing! . . . I burst the dream-webs,
Up I sprang! . . . But thou wast flown!

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. . . Died the leaves.
Sleep I slew for thee, and for thee
Drain'd the tear-wells dry. Then said I,
"I shall see him now!" not knowing,
Then, my speed was but thy spur.

(*The Wind blows.*) Hark! The sad Sea
Moans . . . Nay, winds do walk the tree-tops . . .
Nay . . . what? what? . . . Footsteps! Feet
running
Hither, hither at last! Belovéd,
Here (Heaven shield me!), I am here!

(*It passes.*) Gone!
Past! . . . Not seen! . . . Begone! I hate thee!—
Ah, no, no! . . . Yet see, yon dead leaves
Rise, and with a voice of piping
Dance behind thy dancing feet:

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A NORTHERN MÆNAD

(*The setting sun shines out.*) Yon grave pines,—
Oh, the glamour, the bright glory
Vesting them! . . . thou passest! Pity,
O mere wood, O leaves I trampled,
Ye, the vision'd, me, the blind!

—Wilt thou mock me
As the village youths, and all the
Maidens? (Ah, how much less cruel
They, outcast who do but call me,
Call me, have not made me, mad!)

Mock me, then!
Weeps at home my Mother, and the
Cold fog crawls. But thou didst seek me
Once! I seek thee, Comrade, Comrade,
Till I find, or till I die!

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THE UNKNOWN QUEST

THE pines stand up in strong tranquillity,
The smooth air sleeps like water in a well;
But rest comes never to this restless Sea,
Still heaving with the old incessant swell,
Still clamouring with the old incessant cry.
Thou hast no peace, O Sea! No peace have I!

Nought else is uncontent this happy day;
Even the sky, thy lover, full and tense
With palpable glee, forgets, and can be gay;
But *thou* rememberest! That unquiet sense
No sun, no windless weather may appease,
No calm allay that cry, and let it cease.

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And thro' that ever-importuning voice,
My soul divines and claims a sister-soul,
That, clothed upon with whatsoever joys,
Finds never freedom from the stern control
Of that same dark and irresistible Force
Me also driving on a chartless course.

I would not fling away my life, God knows,
But—should this rock lean over . . . should I fall,
Sink, rise . . . then feel thine arms about me close,
Feel this my life ta'en from me, once for all:
I. so I faced and found THAT—O my Sea,
To what a haven wouldst thou have guided me!

What craving, dost thou clamour day and night?
Seeking for what, can I desire life past?
Death! Death! within thy dark shall we find light,
And, 'mid thy void, our certain goal at last?—
Find, as it were, some once-familiar Breast
That will regather us—and so find rest?

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NEREIA

TIRED of solemn toil, of restless search
After the truth of things that still seem false:
Tired of all our subtle schemes to catch
The living thought, to rend and ravage it,
Till at its heart of hearts our ruthless thirst
For motives and hid meanings and dark signs
Of something great, profound, and serious
Be glutted: tir'd of these, and tir'd to death
Of mine own feverish mind and seething doubts,
I snatch'd a quiet week by the blue sea,
And set to words a picture of my brain
Mere colour, hoping to find rest thereby.—

Grey glimmering twilight fill'd the dewy air,
Right overhead, the dim mysterious sky
Hung motionless; but, far away, it slid
Smoothly and slow into the tranquil sea,

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And sank in it and melted. And the sea
And sky and air were silent, for the dawn
Was not far off; all things lay still and watch'd.
Above the sea, rose, like some giant ghost,
Because the pallid air had swathed it round,
The great pile of the palace; ghostly, too,
Show'd the broad parapet, and the marble steps
That lead from it into the sea beneath;
But, in the day, they all are dazzling white,
Steps, palace, parapet, all a burning white
Beneath the full blue sky.

The water swung
With lazy plash over the sheeny steps,
Or lifted little lips that curl'd and smiled,
Too listless now for laughter, to the verge
Of the unmoved marble, then sank back to rest;
Laugh'd not, nor sobb'd, but breathed and slept
and dream'd.

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And on the fair broad ledges of the steps,
So that the lifted wavelets now and then
Kiss'd the soft flesh that was as smooth as they:
As they are wont to lie there on calm nights,
With every dimple quiet, every voice
Hushen, and every rounded limb at rest:
Lay little children cluster'd, fast asleep.
As, sometimes, looking down the clear blue depth,
You mark, close-cluster'd in some creviced rock,
Bright sea flowers tossing all their hair abroad:
But, could you raise the rock, and bare the bells,
The rosy bells, of water, you should see
How quietly their life would lock itself
Within them—they would sink upon the rock
And sleep, and never move: even so, they slept,
The tender rosy children.

Higher up,
The soft air, gliding from the garden, bore
Fresh fragrance from the lips of sleeping flowers

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To lips more fresh and flowers more beautiful.
For on the marble terrace lay asleep,
Beneath the purple awning still outspread,
A multitude of maidens. Softly fell
The clinging robes round the fair limbs, relax'd,
At touch of sleep's kind hand, into such grace
As movement scarce can know. Some spell it seem'd
Had sweetly stol'n upon them unaware,
With dreamy mesh enfolding them; for none
Had laid her down as tho' in wait for sleep,
Yet every one was bended low with sleep
As rosebuds bend with dew. One stay'd her head
Upon the knees of another, whose own throat,
Fall'n back on the low parapet 'mid the mass
Of all her dusky tresses, gleam d and shone
Even thro' the dim grey air; and close beside,
With both arms hawthorn-white cross'd wearily,
And tir'd brow droop'd upon them, lay one more—
Indeed, the ground was strewn with sleeping girls.

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But one, apart a little from the rest,
And to the sea most near, kept still her face
Seaward, as tho' a faithful watcher yet,
Even amid dreams, for somewhat that should come.
Those other maids but as a fair hedge were
For this, the fairest of the garden. She
Liege lady was by birth and beauty,—she,
Nereia, Princess, sea-named and sea-soul'd.

For by the sea it was she first drew breath,
And the first sight that met her opening eyes
Was the broad blue, a-dazzle with the sun.
Nor ever in all her sixteen years had she
Made once a journey to the dismal lands
That never see the ocean; but her ears
Might still receive its music, and her lips
Echo the voice of the waves. Her dancing eyes
Were sea-blue, and the sun shone clear in them
(Yea, you might read, if you knew how to read,

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Each happy thought before she utter'd it,
So limpid lay the depth of those blue eyes).
Over her head the hair in ripples ran,
Bright in their brownness as the crisped lines
Of polish'd pebbles that the water flings,
In frolic, up and down the sunny beach.
Her forehead, level as the sea far-spread,
Was pure like foam; her steps were light and free,
As the light breeze that springs, at dawn of day
And lustrous even, from the dappled strand
Where earth and ocean meet. Fair, she, and fresh,
Buoyant, deep-hearted, untamed, beautiful;
In all ways as our radiant summer sea,
Beneath whose flickering dance of sun and wave,
Throbs the vast volume of an unknown power;
Loving the ocean as a sister, friend,
A more than mother to her, left motherless.

Only, she long'd, once and again, for him
Who should be sun to her, and she to him

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Sea-like, re-flashing golden love and joy.
And having gain'd her life's whole treasure from
The generous-hearted ocean, also this
She look'd to have from the same loving hand.
And did not look in vain, for, not long since,
Over the shifting waters, like a breeze
To bring the day new freshness, had there come
A gift indeed, a word ineffable,
Meet to give thanks for—how the mighty Prince
Who is the lord of all lands round about,
The loving lord of very loving lands:
Whose goodly grace o'erflowing flings abroad,
Thro' all his realm, delight: as when the sun
At evening overswells his brimming disc,
And, flooded with pure fire, the rich air glows
(This is at sunset, but the Prince breathes yet
Morn's unspent vigour): how this royal lord,
Extoll'd of all for beauty and for power,
Bless'd and belov'd of all, sought yet one gift,—
The crowning glory of Nereia's love.

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And she, a simple maid, what had she done
But given him love long since, his noble deeds
Caught with a rapture to her noble heart?
Yet never had she seen him face to face;
But, daily looking for his coming, grew
Daily more beautiful, and was most glad.

So when, the day before this dawn, a sloop,
Sharp-prow'd, and winged like a butterfly,
Came flitting past the palace, and brought news
Of royal vessels, sailing stately slow
Towards the great rock that keeps the bay at peace,
Nereia clapp'd her hands for joy, and ran
And stood upon the steps; and there stay'd long
Looking for him that was to come. But all
The colour faded from the molten west,
And fainter grew the faint sea-line; and still
No vessel. Then the stars leapt out to watch,
And the great moon made smooth a silver way

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From the high rock straight to Nereia's feet:
But still no vessel.

Then Nereia spake:
"At dawn he will be here; the sleeping breeze
Will wake at dawn, and quickly bring him here;
And he shall find me watching when he comes!
Here on the terrace will I bide, until
Day breaks; yea, here a vigil will I keep,
I and my maidens with me."
So they stay'd,
She and her maidens, there; but presently
Longing for rest grew all too much for them,
The dainty maidens, and they sank to sleep.
But she, that bore within her breast a heart
Throbbing with expectation and strange joy,
Desired not sleep, but kept wide-open eyes,
Lest suddenly the breeze should blow again,
And bring him to the shore, unseen, unhail'd.

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NEREIA

Long time she stood hard by the parapet,
Like a bright beacon 'mid the dusky night,
For she was very tall and white of limb,
And shone in the moonbeams.
But the night wore on,
And still the stars kept vigil, and the moon,
And fair Nereia watch'd with them; but still
No vessel rounded the black jutting rock.

Till, hearing the soft breathing of her maids
Borne slumbrously upon the air, and all
The gentle heavings of the broad sea-breast,
She also sank at last to sleep, o'ercome
By the kind quiet and persuasive peace;
Murmuring low, like a last evening prayer
Oft-times repeated: "Prithee hasten, Love!"
Then slumber touch'd her lips, and all was still.

But now the flushing of the dawn began
To stir within the innocent-hearted heaven;

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And thro' the tender-breaking little rifts
Of faintest crimson, quietly stole forth
The young life of the morning; and the sky
Woke softly from soft slumber, drawing back
Out of the sea's embrace, but still the sea
Slept; nor awoke till Dawn sent forth her swift
Thin-winged messenger, the early breeze,
With its light touch to rouse the dreamy waves,
Telling them "Day is come!"

And presently
Nereia's spirit felt the faint sweet stir
That pass'd along the water and the sky;
And, tenderly as sleep had taken her,
As tenderly it left her, stealing forth
By secret ways that no man knoweth of.
So from the dewy darkness of her dreams
The damsel's spirit fared, but linger'd yet
Within the shadowy opal-tinted mist
That tremulously veers round wakening eyes.
For, first, she knew she had the sea in sight,

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And then it pass'd from her; yet still she heard,
Far-off, its voice; then open'd wide her eyes,
Yet knew not where she was; and closed her eyes,
Yet knew she was a-watch for one to come.
And thus she pictured vague sweet visions forth—
How she would push her light skiff from the shore,
And row her to the vessel where he stood,
And how her hand should touch him, and his face
Should turn towards her—here her eyes grew large
To look, but only saw, still in a dream,
The many-colour'd water; so that thought
Left her, and fled. Anon, with eyelids dropp'd,
She mused again how the tall ship should swing
On the bright water 'neath the gleaming wall
That girds the harbour, and with hasty step
The Prince come forth to find her, where she sat
Among her maidens on the terrace there;
And how, before her kneeling, he should pray—
But here she laugh'd aloud, to think the Prince
To her should kneel! and, starting at the sound,

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Open'd her eyes and half-beheld the sea,
Laid, blue and darkling, 'neath the pale blue sky
Whereon were spread dawn's rosy ruffled wings;
Till, last, her idle gaze fell on the line
Sundering sky and ocean. What was that
Which marr'd the perfect globing of the curve
Hard by the purple rock? Her dreamy mind
Sprang into vigilant life. She saw the fleck
How it grew greater, greater,—nay, became
No longer one, but manifold, each part
Instantly limn'd more clear, more dark, upon
The brightening sky—till suddenly there shot
Out of the midst a fairy white-wing'd bird,
That flew and floated o'er the gentle sea
Right towards the palace-stairway; but the rest
Went sweeping onwards, up the wide-mouth'd bay;
And then Nereia saw that they were ships,
Tall and full-sail'd, that, moving stately on,
Sought room to ride within the harbour, where
Was water deep eno' for such great keels.

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But the white bird flew swiftly o'er the sea
Even to the palace steps. Full near it came,
And lo! it was a pinnace that she saw,
With pearly sails, and with a well-carv'd prow
That bore the semblance of a maiden's face.
Then up she sprang, and stretch'd her fair arms wide
In joyful expectation, all untouch'd
By shadow of fear; Nereia knew not fear;
And in her rapture cried aloud, and woke
The sleeping maids and children at her feet,
Crying with joy, "O Love! My Love!" No less
The new-born waves, delighting in the voice
That was their sister's, raced each other swift
Back from the shore to the fair-carven prow,
Chiming in crystal choruses her words
Clearly; and there was one who heeded them.

But when the boat sped nearer, and the sand
Grew silvery 'neath the shallowing blue waves,

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NEREIA

One leapt into the water, and came, tall
And radiant, wading knee-deep, to the steps.
And she, with wave-like musical motion, pass'd
Rapidly down the marble, till she came
To the last pavement that the water smooth'd
With shimmering light; beyond was nought save
sand.

And, as she gain'd the sea, and he the shore,
Lo! in triumphant glory burst the sun
Out of his rosy palace gates. The sea
Grew gold for joy, and golden glow'd the sails,
And golden joy sprang in Nereia's soul.
Her face was bent on his, her love's, her lord's,
His face, whom she would crown with her glad
troth.
For seeing how the sunbeams on his head
Laid their royal diadem of glorious light,
And what a dazzling radiance had its home

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In his deep eyes, she doubted not at all,
But, "It is thou!" she cried, and eagerly
Flung forth her hands, to meet his eager hands
Outstretch'd; then rais'd her face, and sang aloud:
"O Mother Sea, rejoice, rejoice with me!
My Love is come!
Cry loud with lisping voice,
Ye little waves, "Rejoice!"
Because my Love, my Love, my Love is come!
O mighty Mother Sea, rejoice with me!

"Thou, Bridegroom Sun, rejoice, rejoice with me!
My Love is come!
Wake with thy golden glance
The ripples' gladdest dance,
Because my Love, my Love, my Love is come!
O great and glorious Sun, rejoice with me!"

Soon as she paus'd, he broke free from the spell
With which her sudden song had bound him.

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Straight
He leapt to land, and clasp'd her as she stood.
And she, forgetting all the sun and sea,
Saw but his eyes, felt but his kiss, and knew
This was indeed her bridegroom. So they met.

But now a babble of voices rose around—
The wondering children shouting, and the maids
Down the white stairway flocking towards the twain,
Tumultuous with joy, to lead them in.
So then Nereia took her lover's hand,
And led him to the palace. Very white
And snow-white was it, in the morning sun.
Only the almond blossom hung her veil,
Mazy and delicate, before the gates,
And, on the topmost terrace, oranges
Leant their gold shadowless discs, full-orb'd and bright,

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Gainst the blue shadowless sky. And as they went
Up the broad steps, link'd hand in hand, the twain
Laugh'd, because life was grown so beautiful,
But spake not.
Then a damsel took her lyre,
And sang, more sweet than any bird that sings
Within the garden at the dawn of day:

"Sunbeams, sparkling on the sea,
Sunbeams on the summer sea,
Are sad tears compared with thee,
Tears, compared with thee, Love!
Also they must die with day,
Dull the sea must grow, and grey,—
Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,
Thou wilt live for aye, Love!

"Fair pink blossoms on the tree,
Almond-blossoms on the tree,

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Are sharp thorns compared with thee,
Thorns, compared with thee, Love!
Also, they must fade away,
Not for long the tree is gay—
Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,
Thou wilt live for aye, Love!"

Thereon, another, at Nereia's side,
Her favourite damsel, took the song and sang:

"Warm blue eyes, blue as the sea,
Eyes as living as the sea,
Are cold as Death, Love, without thee,
Death-cold without thee, Love!
Touch them, Love! Ah, golden day!
See what these glad sparkles say!
Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,
Thou wilt live for aye, Love!'

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"Lips like blossoms on the tree,
Pink buds on the almond tree,
Are mute as Death, Love, without thee,
Death-mute without thee, Love!
Touch them, Love! Ah, golden day!
Hear what these pink petals say!
'Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,
Thou wilt live for aye, Love!'"

Then blithe Nereia turn'd her face, and look'd,
Burning with beauty like the glittering sea,
Full in her bridegroom's eyes. He, mute for love,
Told her such truth with them that her blest soul
Could scarce contain itself. Then sang the maid:

"One look—and Love was there to see!
One clasp—Love lock'd them tenderly!
What's Life itself, compared with thee,
Dear Life, compared with thee, Love?"

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Whereat Nereia's happy heart burst forth
Into the song, and thus she ended it:

"O Life, sweet Life, be glad alway!
Our life hath witness'd Love's birthday,
And Love, once born, will live for aye,
Yea, thou wilt live for aye, Love!"

And so they pass'd within the palace gates;
And all the sky was blue, and the sea blue.

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LEON

THE good Lord, Leon of Northumberland,
King Ector's son, had trouble in his youth.
For, first, there was a malison on his birth,
So that his thigh was shrunken; next, his sire,
A great lord, and a mighty man of war,
Hated him, being angry at his hurt:
And then, his mother, whose whole life had been
One prayer for him, with a sad, heavy heart
Died in his greenhead youth.
When she was dead,
Leon, taught curtly how that, being maim'd,
Joustings and tourneys and the joy of war
Were not for him, and making curt reply
He was not for the cloister, found it best
To call the forest home; and there dwelt long,
Father'd and mother'd but by loneliness,

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LEON

Tutor'd in war by beasts, in gentleness
By the small woodland creatures, and in hate
By all he knew of men. Meanwhile he grew
Goodly of face and stature, strong and brave—
A fair lord, but he had a maimed side.

Once, in the season when the charmed woods
Dream and awake not, and the dank blue mist,
Swinging by ghostly hands twixt bole and bole,
Doth print them round with lichens and wet moss:
One heavy noon, beside a mildew'd pool,
Moody he sat, and wish'd, he scarce knew what.
All on a sudden, sharp and shrill rang out
A clamour, "Help! O help!" And straight bestirr'd
By headlong instinct, as a wounded hare
Not stays, but runneth fleetly to its home,
So limping Leon ran; and found a Queen
With two that would have done her knight to death.

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Now men he hated, but his mother's love
Spake for the Queen, and, leaping on those churls,
With unmail'd hands he smote at them, so sore,
So sudden, that their coward's valour slunk
For hiding to their heels. "A pouncing beast!"
One cried; the other, "Mercy!" and they fled.

Then the Queen stood upright, and from her face,
Panting, drew down the veil. He knew her not,
But she was Morgan, the great wizard Queen,
And she knew him, and (for she ow'd him thanks,
And therewith ever loved a goodly face)
Cast spells for him; so, as it were a film
Cover'd her eyes, her voice brake out in gasps,
And as a rime-bound branch upstanding stiff,
"Good cheer," she said, "Sir Leon! From the sea
Comes Venus, and the daughter of a king.
Look clear, speak loud, bow low; thou shalt wed
high."

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Amazed at what he saw, yet more amazed
At what he heard, Leon stood dumb; but when
The life flow'd back into her thawing limbs,
And made her face once more a woman's, he,
Catching his breath, besought more counsel. "Go,
Get to the sea!" she said, and, bending down,
Like one of very flesh and blood she search'd
The wide wounds of her knight, and said no more.
But Leon, lingering, of a sudden found
Nought, save the trampled bracken. Both were
gone.

Marvelling much, he left the woods, and came
To a great Castle by the bare sea-shore.
But neither sight, nor sound, nor good salt smell
Had he to guide him, till he cross'd the dunes;
For the milk-handed mist had tamed the sea,
That, listless as lake water, on the strand
Laid down her weak, wan waves, each one a sob.
No hovering gull, no guillemot busy-wing'd,

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Rent the thick-webbed air; the sharp black isles,
The beacon Castle, were not; close in shore,
Dark bladderwrack, the strong tide's thrall, thrust up
Her million nodding and exultant heads;
Nothing else moved.

And now the clammy calm,
The waves' gasp, and the stealthy swathing mist,
Wrought upon Leon like the sense of Death.
He paus'd upon the midway sand, secrete,
Alone; in the dim silence Morgan's words
Burst lurid on his mind, a sinister glare,
And lit the one thought—Death.
"Fool! fool!" he cried;
A savage laughter took him. "From the sea
Love was to rise? Out of the sea, forsooth,
My bride was coming? Oh, a fair conceit,
Kind Queen! a riddle plain to rede! Ay, thee,
Rising at last to rid me of life's hate,

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Thee see I clear, thee speak I loud, thee,—Death!
'Bow low?' Yea! even to the ocean-floor,
Where wait high nuptials with a fair bride—Death!
Give ye good welcome, O most royal bride!
Ah, Venus! ah, sweet guerdon from the sea,
Gramercy!" (and he hirpled down the sand),
"Gramercy!"

Thereupon, the mist, with voice
Near and outringing, toss'd an answer back,
"Who cries Gramercy?"

Leon's heart stood still.
Who spoke? Or can the mist find words, and speak?
"Who cries Gramercy?" At this second call,
Remembering Death, he answer'd listlessly,
"I, Leon, son of Ector." Came the voice:
"Wait, Leon, son of Ector! Wait for me!"
So there he stay'd; for Morgan's glozing words

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Held honey yet; the voice was not a man's,
And he began to wonder if the fog
Held very Venus with some royal maid.
At such fair prospect, Death he clean forgot,
And on the hard, wet sand abiding, peer'd
Hither and thither. By-and-by, a swell
Of glossy water quell'd the bladderwrack,
With a loud sudden splash striking the shore;
But scarce he heard it, for this time the voice
Cried almost at his ear: "Ho! Ector's son,
Where art thou?" And with widening eyes, he said,
"Here, Queen!"

Mocking she laugh'd, mocking she look'd,
Face to his face, and breath upon his cheek—
No Venus, no, nor queen, but a fish-girl
Brown and bare-neck'd, with ankles in the sea.
Her girded dress, bright limbs, and heavy hair,
That, dark and gleaming like sea-ribbon, clung

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Round her wet, laughter-quaking throat—all these
Breathed out the sea's own breath of pungent
brine.

"Leon, good son of Ector! what dost here?
Mercy! the dolorous look! Oh, hie thee hence,
And sit thee by the fagot! For I swear
By mine own heart, the which thou makest ache
With laughter at such sourness, never once
Saw I a knight less worthy of my sea,
Mother of every health, the live strong sea!"

She stopp'd; her loosen'd laughter came again,
Curdling the milky air, and by his cheek
Drove the thin mist with brush of chilly wings.
Till, perching both bare arms upon a rock
Like two bright stems to prop that salt sea-flower
Her pointed face, she pucker'd up her lips
To keep them still, and stood regarding him.

But Leon had no spirit to be moved—

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Hazy despair had wrapt him like a fog,
Dull acquiescence calm'd all impulses.
"Damsel!" he said, "half in my heart it were
To wish your face as dolorous, if thro' that
Such wine of laughter might but touch my lips.
Nay, prithee!" (for her face grew grave), "laugh on,
And, in a little, tell me of thy name."

"Riance!" quoth she: "Dark Riance is my name;
I have it of my laughter. But, fair Sir,
What do you on my marches? Lack you crabs
Or spotted jellies, limpets, cloudy shrimps—
Or had you but a mind to taste my fog?
Good wholesome cheer for heart and stomach both,
And yet meseems you do not thrive withal?"
With that she smiled, a very vexing smile.

"Nay, child," he said; "Reserve for fishermen

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Thy lavish wealth; but I am none. My nets
Were spread for spoil far richer."

"What is that?
Will it content you? For my father seeks,
He says, a richer spoil, honours and lands,
And never hath eno'; I in my Sea
Find rich contentment. Will your spoil suffice?"
"Ay! for 'tis Death!" he said.

At that dark word,
Flat fell her cheek as the undimpled waves.
Leon himself, at something in her look,
Shrank from the dismal thought. Now first it seem'd
Harsher to die than live, nay, life was sweet,
Death terrible. What sudden rising sun
Made such a sharp division, light from dark,
Dawn on his twilight spirit?

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"Must it be?"
The words brake from him: "Death? Oh, horrible,
Impossible!" A doubtful hope flash'd up:
"Perchance not Death she meant! Perchance I err'd!
I *will* not die!"

At once the fish-girl's face
Quicken'd; at once he felt the doubt decrease!
"Pray you," he cried, "all japeries apart,
Saw you at any time from out this sea
A fair Queen rising, wondrous fair! and bright
Like foam upon the waters are her feet—
Know you of such?" But Riance shook her head,
And spake not. Loath to lose the sudden hope,
"Your folk," he urged, "may give her some sea-name,
'Queen of the Sea,' or 'Lady of the Sea;'

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Know you none such?" She hung her head, her cheeks
Grew rosy—why? "I have seen one," she said,
"That hath a curious love to play among
The merry wavelets, hangeth on their necks—
And I have seen bright foam beneath her feet.
If it be she you mean, she is not near
So bright and fair as foam is; but, in sooth,
Folk call her Maid, and Lady, of the Sea."
Here she peep'd sidelong at him, like a bird,
As if in doubt; but all his doubts were gone.
"O ignorant!" he cried, "do ye not know
Whom ye have seen? But I know! Blessed words!
Not Death, not Death, not Death! O gentle maid,
That Queen I seek; pray lead me where she is;
And Heaven reward thee with undazzled sight!"
"Wherefore? What would'st thou with her?"
Riance ask'd,
And ey'd him much askance, but did not laugh.
He, seeing speedy haven for his hopes

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With wind of so fair promise, answer'd quick,
"Worship I owe her, and a boon beside
Have I to beg."

"What is your boon?"

"Fair maid,
Have done with teasing! Prithee, show me her!
The boon imports thee nothing."

"How, fair Sir!
How should I grant it, then? Down on your knees!
I thought in kindness to award the boon,
Waiving the worship. Since you will not—why,
Long worship scarce will win that boon, methinks!"
O treacherous wind! What hidden reef was this?
Was it the mist wrought so bewilderingly?
He stood confused. But Riance chirrup'd on,
Flouting, and fleering, yet in all her ways
Sweet as a wagtail on the briny beach:

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"So slow of courtesy, Sir Dolorous-Face?
Art doubtful? Why, me was it not you sought,
Me, they call Maid, and Lady, of the Sea?
Art dainty? Are my trickling sands too hard?
Nay, but thy knees, forsooth, too proud! Kneel, kneel!
Bow low, do worship! Then—who knows? The boon. . . ."

What with the weltering mist, that of her form
Made something formless, something weird and vague,
Continually drifting, yet unmoved:
What with her mockery, and some blurred shame
Felt in his tangled mind: as a sick man
Resigns his peevish and self-thwarting will
With tacit pleasure to his resolute nurse,
So Leon was reliev'd at her behest,
And knelt.

Now Riance, while she spake with him,

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Both for the fog, and the upsloping sand,
Saw not his hurt; but when he came to kneel
He did it hardly, and she, coming close,
Found that his side was maim'd; and when she mark'd
His cavern'd eyes and miserable mouth,
And the deep furrows by the plough of Pain
Dug out on cheek and youthful forehead, then
Her tender heart rebuked her, slow great tears
Well'd in her innocent eyes, and from the breast
Whence the wild laughter leapt but now, a sob,
A long, deep sob, came bursting. And he took
Her sea-stain'd hand to kiss it, but she snatch'd
The fingers from him, and she fell and wept
Heart-broken on the sand. No Venus, she!

But Leon, thinking that she had but slipp'd
On weed or slimy stones, crawl'd to her side;
Lifted her, not with ease, for he was lame,
And rose, supporting her; and she look'd up—

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At him she look'd, and straightway hid her face,
For she that wont to laugh was weeping now,
And she that mock'd him clung about his neck.

Then he, maim'd Leon, that had never felt
Anything nestle to him, needing him,
Thought nothing more of Venus, nothing more
Of Morgan and her promise, nothing more
Of anything save Riance; rais'd her head,
And on the mist-wet, sea-wet, tear-wet face
Press'd passionate kisses, born of gratitude
And love.

And Riance, comforted, said, "Leon,
Forgive me! Tell me, who is it ye seek?
For I will help your quest." But he cried out:
"Venus I sought, and a king's daughter; now
I seek them not!"

"No Venus do I know;
"She dwells not here," quoth Riance, much perplex'd.

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"King Lamorake is my father, and, save him,
Here is no King."

As the thick fog is blown
To tatters by strong wind, and leaves clear air,
Her words brought light at last to Leon. "Oh,
Out of the sea," he cried, "in very truth
Is risen the Queen of Love and Loveliness,
Out of the sea my Queen! And I will bow
Low as the grave; yea, I will beg so loud
The stars at noon shall hear me, if thereby
The promise sweetly closing-in thy strain,
Wizard! ring rhymes with Truth. If it prove so,
Oh, then, be blessed! Oh, then, not for Death—
For Life, for Life, Gramercy!"

As he spake,
Leon the dolorous laugh'd, and with him laugh'd
Riance, her eyes tear-bright. And well he spake;
For they two loved together all life long.

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.

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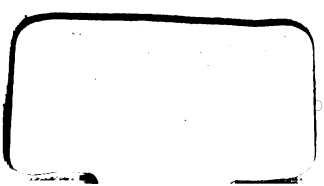

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